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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 003138

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM PHUM PINR RS

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH GARRY KASPAROV: KOSOVO
CONCERNS

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons 1,4 (b), (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Garry Kasparov on June 26 talked with the Ambassador about the future of his Other Russia movement, the state of other political parties, the Russian presidential succession, the December Duma elections, and Russian foreign policy. He ascribed President Putin's recent hard line with the West to a strategy of creating bargaining chips, but argued passionately that Kosovo was not one of them. Kasparov described rare OR agreement with the GOR that Kosovo independence could spark very negative developments in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and Moldova, as well as create turmoil in Russian domestic politics. He urged that no decision for independence be taken, at least until after the March 2008 Russian presidential succession. Kasparov was, typically, optimistic about the future role of Other Russia in Russian politics. He thought the western-leaning movements would settle on a united candidate, and he signaled that would be ex-Central Bank Chairman Gerashchenko, by the early fall. End summary.

Kasparov on Russian Foreign Policy

¶2. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question about foreign policy, Kasparov ascribed President Putin's hard line to a strategy of creating "bargaining chips." The only issue that did not fall into that category, he argued, was Kosovo. "It is the one serious foreign policy issue in Russian society," Kasparov said. Kasparov compared the GOR's behavior on the Estonian war monument with its consistent line on Kosovo. Russian commercial issues, among them the North Sea pipeline, trumped any unhappiness caused by the Estonian government's decision to re-locate the monument. For that reason, President Putin had remained silent about Estonia, which has not been the case with Kosovo, Kasparov said. All Russians, including the members of Other Russia, see a connection between Kosovo independence and potential developments in Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova, and Abkhazia. Kasparov said Nagorno-Karabakh in particular was a tinderbox, and it could take only Kosovo independence to ignite it.

¶3. (C) Kasparov strongly suggested that the West not "touch the Kosovo issue" before the Russian change of government in March 2008. Any earlier decision would benefit "only Russia's dark forces" and would have "disastrous consequences for Russian domestic politics."

¶4. (C) Should the members of Other Russia be in a position to influence Russian foreign policy, they would join the GOR's consensus on Kosovo, Kasparov said, but they would push for a re-assessment of Russia's relations with China. Kasparov

said that he, the National Bolshevik Party's Eduard Limonov, and other OR members were worried about China's behavior in the Russian Far East. OR's on-and-off colleague, Duma Deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov, who hailed from the eastern Altai region, had described a rapid growth in Chinese influence there that had caused him to reassess his views, as well.

Russian Nationalism

15. (C) Kasparov made a point of expressing worries about nationalism. After several, low-profile months, he noted that Aleksandr Belov's Movement Against Illegal Immigration had re-emerged as a key participant in an ugly brawl in Moscow. Kasparov thought the fracas, which reportedly had Russian nationalists attacking Central Asians and Armenians, had been staged. His evidence was the sheer concentration of Central Asians who, under normal circumstances, cannot "walk the city in twos or threes without being stopped by the police." Kasparov worried what the reactivation of Belov might mean for the election season. He joined other commentators here in wondering if it might somehow be linked to nationalist politician Dmitriy Rogozin's efforts to register his party "Great Russia."

16. (C) Kasparov described the increasing prominence of nationalism as part of an "important debate in Russian society." Although himself not an ethnic Russian, Kasparov said he parted company with many of his colleagues in OR in believing it was important that Russia move from the distinction between the different words signaling citizens of Russia and ethnically Russian to a consensus that all citizens of Russia be identified by a single term. Kasparov

MOSCOW 00003138 002 OF 003

tied the need for a consensus self-definition to Russia's future as a nation state, instead of an empire. He read the nationalist websites, and although they contained a lot of "nonsense," there was also evidence that their participants were attempting to understand the problem of national self-definition. Kasparov termed it the "most important issue" for Russia, and tied its proper resolution to Russia's survival as a coherent nation state.

Other Russia

17. (C) Kasparov attempted to put the best gloss on Other Russia's past and future. The recent demonstrations in St. Petersburg and Moscow had demonstrated that OR was a force to be reckoned with. The St. Petersburg event had drawn two thousand five hundred participants, but that number could easily have become 25 thousand had OR been allowed to march down the northern capital's main street. The special forces troops had been sidelined for the two events, although Kasparov alleged, they would have intervened decisively had OR not abided by the conditions under which it was allowed to demonstrate. The street events would resume in the fall, he said.

18. (C) Kasparov projected a fall convention (to follow the July 8 - 9 OR conference) at which a consensus presidential candidate would be nominated. Ex-Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov was "slowly accepting the fact" that he would not be OR's choice. Kasparov continued to speak highly of ex-Central Bank Chairman Viktor Gerashchenko. Gerashchenko was someone the Communist Party, but not Communist Party Chairman Zyuganov, could endorse. The Communist Party was key, as "its members vote." Still, OR would make an effort to encourage youth activism, as Russia needed new voters with different attitudes than the pensioners. He sketched an OR strategy that would see the OR conference in July followed by efforts by the likes of economist Illiaronov and analyst Mikhail Delyagin to explain to the public "why the regime in

"its present form" cannot survive. That would be followed by the fall convention that would feature appearance by Gerashchenko, emigre Viktor Bukovskiy, and perhaps Kasyanov. OR, Kasparov summed up, was "in better shape than one year ago," and would be a factor in Russia's elections.

¶ 9. (C) Among the reasons Kasparov thought OR was better positioned than one year ago was increasing dissent in the organizations of its competitors. SPS had recently had to "kill its Moscow organization." Some in the Communist Party were increasingly alienated from its leadership, while even Liberal Democratic Party leader Zhirinovskiy seemed increasingly uncertain of whom to be loyal to in his public appearances. Turmoil in other political parties could only benefit OR, Kasparov thought.

¶ 9. (C) Kasparov believed that the fall would be a time of increased instability in the Kremlin and "if OR can survive until the fall," it had a chance to capitalize on that instability to advance its cause. Kasparov even thought it possible that some of the would-be losers in the Kremlin power struggle could throw their weight behind his movement. Members of Yabloko, the Union of Right Forces (SPS) could affiliate themselves as well.

Succession

¶ 10. (C) Putin, said Kasparov, would step down. He did not exclude the possibility of relatively "free and fair elections," but among anointed potential successors. The December Duma election was of less interest to him. "This Duma will be short-lived, and will be highly unstable" because of the March 2008 succession, he thought.

Comment

¶ 11. (C) Kasparov was his usual, intense, upbeat self throughout his conversation with the Ambassador. His sunny predictions about the relative weight of OR in the upcoming elections may be based in part on a calculation that he can leverage his visibility in the West to the movement's advantage in Russia. Kasparov described an upcoming, in-depth David Remnick profile in The New Yorker, a 60 Minutes segment, even an interview on The Colbert Report, in addition to the release of his new book in several languages as part of his agenda for October, when the campaign here should be under way in earnest. The other subject that most

MOSCOW 00003138 003 OF 003

energized Kasparov during this meeting were the potential consequences of Kosovo independence, where he, for the first time in Embassy's memory, backed the GOR's approach unequivocally.

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